



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

August 28, 2022

Pastor Randy Ott

12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson: [Haggai 1:12-14](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 33

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Revelation 3:1-6](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 12:32-40](#)

### **The Believer Follows Christ... Wake Up!**

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, through Jesus Christ and the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

Thirty-four years ago, before I was assigned to be a vicar in a congregation (after four years of college, two years of seminary, third year of seminary you go spend a year in a congregation), I recall praying fervently for the Lord to send me some place besides Milwaukee and Watertown. That's where I had been the last six years. I just wanted to go somewhere different and serve the Lord. God, in His infinite wisdom, sent me to Juneau, Wisconsin. I don't know if you know where Juneau is—10 miles from Watertown. I've always thought God has a great sense of humor. He kind of wants us to know that He knows what is best. It was a great year. It was a wonderful year. It was a huge congregation. There was a ton of work to do. It really taught me about the value of making sure you get what you can get done, done and but also know that you aren't going to get everything done. Keep your eyes on Jesus and serve.

One of the things I learned that year was to get everyplace early because the vicar that was there before me, he was a good man and a faithful servant of God, but he had a sleep disorder. On the Sunday mornings for worship, he would set alarms all over his apartment so he would have to get up and shut them off. He had people that were calling him that lived out of town to wake him up because of his sleep disorder. He wouldn't wake up. So at times he slept through services and things like that. It wasn't that he was lazy. It was a sleep disorder. But having heard some of the people grumble about that, I got everyplace an hour early. I just got in the habit of doing that.

This morning I got here at 7a.m. just so that I was here early. I am used to that. I get what I have to get done and then I sit down and take my nap before you take your nap. But as I thought about this sleep disorder he had, I kind of thought there should have been a surefire way to wake someone up. I don't know, maybe you want to invent this and if you do this, you can take it to Shark Tank and do whatever you want with it, but here is my idea. Instead of an alarm clock that is annoyingly loud and buzzes or beeps or whatever, there should be one that just over and over says "Amen. Amen. Amen." That seems to work for you guys. So do with that what you want.

Our God talks to us this morning about a sleep disorder, but it's not a physical sleep disorder. It's a spiritual sleep disorder. Our God comes to us and urges us to **wake up!** At times I think each and every one of us, including the Christians at Sardis way back when, can fall into this spiritual slumber where we get so distracted by the things that need to be done daily or the things that we're facing or the challenges that come from life or the temptations that come from the devil, the world and our own sinful nature that we are in danger of falling into a spiritual sleep. So God comes to us today and says "**Wake Up!**" That's what our God urges us to do and we do that by focusing on these incredible promises He has made to us and by recognizing that they are the greatest treasure we'll ever have. That will hopefully keep us from falling into this spiritual slumber.

Last Lent we looked at the Seven Letters to the Seven Churches during our Lenten Midweek services. Sardis is the fifth one. He started out in Ephesus and he was going kind of clockwise around Asia Minor. He had gone up the Aegean Coast and then he went inland. Now Sardis was straight south. Sardis was at one point in time a super wealthy city. Historians tell us that it was one of the first places that used coinage. The king was very wealthy and began to issue coins. They think it might have been the first place that did that. It was located on a mountainside about 1,700 feet above the bottom of the valley. It was highly fortified. It was thought to be a city you would never be able to conquer because of its location and its fortifications. Twice in its history, 600BC and then 300BC, it was conquered. Historians tell us that the opposing army that was attacking them climbed up the mountainside during the night. Evidently the guys that were supposed to be watching needed an alarm clock. They got overrun and the city was overrun. If they would have been awake and sounded the alarm, they probably would have warded off this attack just by the nature of the city.

So if you're a resident of Sardis and you know this history from your past and you hear God come to you and say "**Wake up!**" and literally what He says in the Greek is "Be watchful," you know what He is talking to you about. There is danger. There is real danger here. So what is the danger? God sounds pretty harsh here. He says "**I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and** repent!" Those are pretty strong words! In all the Seven Letters, there are only two of them that don't have anything where God says "Hey,

you're doing this great. You guys do this well. You do that well." It's this one and Laodicea that He just says, "Here is the problem with you people. You guys are about to lose everything, so wake up!"

The other thing to note that I find interesting is that to both Sardis and Laodicea He doesn't mention any problems that they are having, any persecution that they are suffering, any difficulty that they are suffering. Sometimes isn't that when we wake up, when we turn to God, when we're facing some challenge that all of a sudden we understand we can't face it on our own and we need someone's help that is bigger and smarter and stronger than us? That's our God. So maybe sometimes it's not so bad if things come into our life that leads us to go back to God. That's how God uses everything to work for the good of those who love Him.

These letters were to real congregations at real points in time. But the truths that Jesus shared with them through these letters in [Revelation 2 and 3](#) speak to things that were going on in this historical church, and they are things for the churches of all time that God wants the local congregations to watch out for. For us He is saying, "Watch out that you're not just going through the motions." We can do that at times.

Some of you have your own pew here at church, right? When you come into church, you know that's your pew. You ever give someone a dirty look because they're sitting in your pew? You guys that have been doing this your whole life, you know when to stand and sit, all these Lutheran gymnastics that we do through worship. You know how to do that. If someone else doesn't know that, "What's wrong with them? I know what I'm doing. Why don't they?" If you can get kind of hung up on some of the outward things, going through the motions, you have a reputation of being alive, but you're not. Just because great grandpa helped dig the basement underneath the first part of the school, that's not a golden ticket. This isn't Willie Wonka. That doesn't give you a golden ticket to get into heaven. It's only a living and active relationship with Jesus Christ that gets you into heaven. If we start looking at the things WE do and the motions we are going through, we can focus too much on ourselves and that can cause us to fall into this spiritual slumber, just like the people in Sardis did.

I have a feeling that every single one of us here, at one time or another, has been starting to drift off to spiritual sleep, myself included, because we're sinners; sinners sin. We can get so focused on planning for this, planning for that, dealing with this issue or dealing with that issue that we forget the greatest treasure we have isn't the financial plans we're making. It's the promise that Jesus has come to live and die in our place and take away our sins and heaven is open to us. We can almost take that for granted as though "Yeah, yeah, I know that, but I have other issues." When Jesus comes back at the end of the world, if we're still alive, all those other issues are gone in flash, in the

twinkling of an eye. Then it's just a matter of whether you have a relationship with Jesus Christ or not. So the encouragement to **wake up** is to see that this is a danger we can fall into.

Jesus also speaks to the people in Sardis and to us a warning that is a little chilling if you understand what He is saying. He says, "Wake up! Strengthen what remains and repent. Acknowledge your own sinfulness and that Jesus alone is the answer for that sin. Or else I'll come to you like a thief in the night and you'll lose what you have." I don't think He's talking there about the end of the world, like He was in our Gospel. The Gospel I think was the end of the world, but I think here when He says "Wake up! Repent. Strengthen what remains or else I'm going to come to you like a thief in the night" He's talking about the danger at times that if we fall into such a deep, spiritual slumber, we harden our heart to God and His promises, we find other things that are more important, and eventually God comes and hardens our hearts.

Remember Moses and Pharaoh and the Ten Plagues? The first number of plagues—Pharaoh hardened his heart. Pharaoh hardened his heart. Pharaoh hardened his heart. That was the message of Moses; the message that was from God. Eventually it says that God hardened his heart. It's a fearful thing to fall under the hands of the living God because we have put other things in front of Him and we don't treasure Him like we should. I think that's what He's saying to us and those words are kind of chilling. But man, are they important!

For all my years as a pastor, one constant has always been there. People always say to me, "When this happens, then that person I was concerned about that we haven't seen in worship for a long time will come back." "When they get back from college, they'll come back." "When they get married, they'll come back." "When they have children, they'll come back." "When their children get to Sunday school or school, they'll come back." I've heard all those things over and over and over, but it seems to me in the last 10 years that things are different. Less and less I see people coming back, even if they take their children to our school or our Sunday school. If it's important for the child to learn, what does the child see when the parents aren't having a living and active faith that treasures the promises of God, both at home and at worship? That worries me! That wakes me up at night.

When I say things like that in a sermon, I often hear this, "Oh pastor that was a great point. You're dead on. But the people that need to hear that weren't here." I just told you a little bit ago that this is ALL of us at one time or another. We ALL need the message to value Christ because we ALL can do that. But do I understand there are other people that would benefit greatly from the Spirit working in their hearts through that message and they're not here to hear it? Yes, I get that. I understand that. God has a plan for that!

Did you know that? God has a plan for that! Do you know what it is? He has called YOU to share how important faith in Jesus Christ is with other people. Isn't that something that He doesn't call the angels, who don't make excuses like I am inclined to and maybe like you are inclined to? Instead He calls sinners/saints, those of us that believe in Jesus, who still have that sinful nature that will make those excuses and say it's someone else's job. He calls us to always give an answer for the hope that we have but do so with gentleness and respect. We're not called to shame someone else or guilt someone else into being close to Jesus. We're called to share that Jesus is the greatest treasure we have and we need to stay close to Him.

Here is the amazing thing about our God. He tells us that when we speak this truth, the devil comes and tells you that if you're going to speak this truth, you'll screw it up. Did you ever have the devil whisper that in your ear? Think about that for a minute. First of all, if the person that you're talking to doesn't believe in God at all, where are they going when they die? Hell. If you screw it up, they aren't going to "heller." They're still just going to hell. You can't make it worse! But what God says is that He is going to work through us as we speak His Word faithfully. We just tell what we know to be true. We don't have to say everything there is to know about God. Because we're still on this side of heaven, we aren't going to know everything about God. But you and I know that the greatest gift that we have is that we know that Jesus lived and died in our place. We know that we have a God who loves and forgives us, not because we do anything but because He has done it all and His love for us is unending. That's the coolest thing in the world! That's the message we share. We don't get upset with people, we just love people. We share that truth.

Look at our God. Look at our God at the top of Page 6 in the Service Folder. Our God there amazes me. If I'm God and people like me would have turned my back on God over and over and over, I would have given them the boot. "That's it! You're done!" That's not our God! Look at what He says. Sardis was an area that was known for its clothing, so He says ***"Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy."*** They are worthy because God made them worthy by Christ living and dying in their place. But now, look at Verse 5: ***"The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life..."*** The one who is victorious—who is that? That's the one who wakes up and repents. It doesn't matter what we have done. It doesn't matter what you have done. It doesn't matter what I have done. How we have hurt our God, our God says when He works that repentance in our heart He will tell us immediately that we are His forgiven child.

Today He gives us the very body and blood that was shed on the cross so that we know how serious He is about our forgiveness. It's for us. It's for everyone who God wakes up

from this spiritual slumber. And how He has chosen to wake others up is when you and I share the Gospel message of Christ. So in a very real sense, all you folks are God's alarm clock. Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** [\(Philippians 4:7.\)](#) Amen.